

Catharine Lucas

STRUCK BIRDS

San Gregorio State Beach, California

Tide-packed sands; cliffscapes, buff and russet. One bleached rock thrust skyward, its sharp-edged gleam startling a blue so deep it fights the gaze. Far above, two gulls repeat the trick, finite white making infinite blue—advertising their importance to the universe. At my feet lies one of their own, wings spread in crucifix. A coil of ruby ribbon teased from the gut gleams on pristine breast. The scene is fresh, a surgery interrupted. Feast or sacrifice, the stuff of gospel. Meant.

Not so, death on tarmac. The overpass off 580 draws nesting pigeons, ash gray, unlit. They drop to graze the road. Some are crushed, standing, others struck in flight—windshield, grill, bumper. I stop beside a dark smear. It reads like poems I've seen, wall-to-wall blocks of text; the eye makes of these a single blur in passing.

I balk at reading them, these struck birds, glued where they fell, nothing to suggest intent. They evoke reportorial prose suited to accidents and allowing some possible fault in the victims. I borrow the tone, considering certain deaths that fail to startle, being dark on dark, as news goes.

Hard to convey the brightness lost.

